

Buddhist Sermons

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(1) Counting The Breath & Walking Meditation

Transcription of a Dhammatalk delivered on 8/12/95

This is the first talk of the meditation retreat here at the monastery, and I like to use this time just to give a basic instruction on the way of meditation which I am encouraging everyone to do here during the retreat. At this time of the retreat I am going to encourage what we call the practice of *samatha*, and *samatha* is the *Pāli* word which is used for that activity, that attitude of mind which causes tranquillity, which settles disturbances, and which takes the mind to an evenness. You may imagine that the mind, when it is disturbed, is like a lake with waves on the surface, and we are trying to tranquillise the mind, to be able to keep it still, but still have awareness in the mind. We are looking to attain a bright, still, tranquil awareness inside. The word '*Samatha*' is used in many places by the

Buddha to describe any activity which deals with business, which settles the duties, and results eventually in all the disturbances disappearing. This is why you may regard this path of meditation as a settling meditation, whose result is calm. In order to settle the mind, you need a lot of application of the mind, continuously putting the mind in one direction. Actually the mind's natural state is to be still, is to be tranquil. However, because of the defilements of the mind, because of its search for satisfaction, its search for pleasure, its search for something to do, outside of itself, it very rarely reaches its natural, tranquil state. A very skilful meditator, who knows the mind very well, can just by cutting off that part of the mind which goes outwards, by just cutting it off, can very quickly make the mind still, and go into deep states of calm. However, for the rest of us, we have to use a skilful means, a path, a way, in order to bring this mind to its natural state of calm, settled, bright awareness. In order to do that, the Buddha gave instructions, and the type of meditation which he praised above all others was the meditation on the in-and-out-breath, the *ānāpānasati*. And this is the type of meditation which I like to teach here during this retreat.

This way of meditation using *ānāpānasati* is, on the surface, quite simple, the instructions are quite bare. However, if one keeps to those instructions and follow them, then usually it would result in attaining states of calm, states of deep inner stillness. The way the Buddha taught to develop *ānāpānasati* is as follows:

First of all one just finds a quiet place. There is nothing magical about sitting on the chair or sitting on the floor, and you can gain very deep states of mind in any posture. So during this retreat, if you find that your knees or your back or any other part of the body is causing you intense pain, then go and sit on a chair, or use a stool. This meditation retreat is not to torture you. You find that if you have too much discomfort of the body, you block off all possibility for the mind to become tranquil. One of the reasons why the Buddha taught the Middle Way is that too much indulgence and too much discomfort will make the mind hard, so hard that it will be impossible to take it to peacefulness. And without taking it to

peacefulness it is impossible for it to gain wisdom. So when we sit down we must always remember the Middle Way and make sure we are not sitting in a posture which is causing great pain, just because we want to sit on the floor, because everyone else is sitting on the floor. So be humble, give up your pride, and then you find your meditation will proceed much better.

Having sat down on the floor, then the Buddha said, you should bring mindfulness in front of you. Bringing mindfulness in front of you means that you should cast aside all of the external distractions of the mind. Instead of having one's mindfulness a great distance from one, either a great distance in the physical world or a great distance in or outside of this moment, one has to cut off all that in order to develop mindfulness in front of one. That should be one of the first tasks after one has closed the eyes, just to gather the attention in the moment, and to take it away from the past and the future, to take it away from anything, any concern outside of this meditation retreat. Sometimes that will take a few minutes, just to get the mindfulness established in the moment, in the here and now. Once that mindfulness is established in the here and now, then it is time for you to choose the meditation object and to develop that meditation object. In order for the mind to be at peace it has to take up a peaceful object. The mind cannot exist without its object. It has to take up something, and often the object which the mind takes is called its food and its nutriment. The mind will always be looking for that food and nutriment, something to, as it were, occupy it. If one doesn't give the mind a clear and peaceful object, then the mind will go out searching for something else, and very often it will be an unpeaceful, stimulating, disturbing object. So we have to choose a peaceful object. At this stage in the meditation, having attained this basic mindfulness, we choose our meditation object. And we are going to choose the object which we call the breath.

Some meditation teachers will tell you where to watch the breath. In my experience of practising and teaching it seems more successful to be unconcerned where you experience the breath. Simply because some people

experience the breath at the tip of the nose, some people in their abdomen and some people in other places in their body. And the point of this meditation is: It does not matter where you experience the breath. In the beginning part of the meditation, all one needs to do is to have that experience clearly in one's mind. The first part of the meditation is just knowing that one is breathing in, just knowing that one is breathing out. And that is all which is required. And very often you will find that if you look for the breath in a particular part of your body, one of two distractions can occur. The first distraction is that the breath isn't manifesting itself in that part of the body. You are looking there and you can't see the breath, you can't experience it. Not having a clear object the mind will go searching for something else, it will go wandering off, and you lose any hope of success in meditation. So that is the first obstacle in trying to observe the breath at a particular point, that the experience of breath isn't manifesting there, the mind will go wandering off.

The second obstacle or disadvantage to that is, that if you are watching the breath at one particular point, you are becoming aware of the physical body as well as the process of breathing. You are likely to become more aware of other parts of the physical body especially in the vicinity of where you are watching the breath. Any itches or aches, heat or cold, will also become manifest to your mind as well as the breath. If those physical feelings are strong, then they can take your attention away from the breath onto the physical body, and the body does not attain tranquillity very quickly. The body tends to keep on disturbing you if you try and watch the breath at a particular part of the body. Watching the breath at a particular part of the body is like too much body awareness and it brings up all the rest of the body with it and it becomes hard to let go and dismiss these physical feelings. That's the second disadvantage. However, if you just recognise whatever it is, whatever physical or whatever informs you of where the breath is in the cycle of coming in and going out, just enough to know: 'breath going in or breath going out', just that much, then you are centred on the meditation object which leads to calm. Just the knowledge of the breath. The way the Buddha

taught *ānāpānasati* is that to begin with you just notice whether the breath that is going in is long, or you notice whether the breath that is going in is short. This as a means to gain some interest in watching the in-and-out-breath. Just watching the in-and-out breaths for some meditators is not sufficient, it does not attract the mind, there 's not enough to do there to keep the mind's attention. So, in order to know long or short, it just needs that extra piece of mindfulness. However, many of you will know that the way I teach *ānāpānasati* is, instead of necessarily noticing whether the breath is long or short, just to know that the breath is going in and just to know that the breath is going out. The most important part of this stage in the meditation is to be able to **sustain one's attention** over many successive breaths, not just one or two breaths in succession, but literally hundreds of breaths in succession. So you know every in-breath, out-breath, in-breath, out-breath, one after the other, not missing one.

That brings me on the point to the point which is very important in order to understand what we are actually doing here, and that is the meaning of the Buddhist word '*Samādhi*'. You may have read many definitions of that term. I think you might find the most practical definition, the one use can use and gain good results from, is to understand *Samādhi* as the ability of the mind to **sustain** its attention on the chosen object. And the most important word is **sustaining** the attention. Anyone can watch a breath, an in-breath and out-breath, just once, but it takes a skilful meditator to be able to watch, say, one hundred or two hundred breaths, one after the other, without missing any. It is only when one can achieve that sustained attention on one chosen object that the quality of mind deserves to be called *Samādhi*.

Not only is it called *Samādhi*, but it is also called tranquillity, because if the mind has sustained its attention on one thing, it is at the expense of the mind becoming diverse and going off to many different objects. When the mind is not diverse, and it does not travel to many different places, it is called a tranquil mind. A mind that has sustained its attention on one thing for a long time, is a

mind which does not move very much, and that's why it is called tranquil. If you sustain, as it were, the position of your mind, its focus where its looking at, then the mind deserves to be called tranquil. So, it is true, the ability to sustain the awareness on an object, that will create this quality of mind which is called *Samādhi*. One-pointedness. It is better to understand one-pointedness as pointed on one object for a **long** length of time. If you like: 'one-pointedness in time', rather than 'one-pointedness in space'. So this is what the meaning of *Samādhi* is.

In order to attain that *Samādhi*, we have to work hard to sustain the attention on just the in-and-out-breath. One method which I teach, which is very effective, is to count the breath. Even though one might have been meditating for many years, the technique is still useful. I use the counting system now and again to test myself to make sure that I am calm, I am mindful, and that I am clear. Counting is a very simple method: when you breath in you count yourself one silently, breath out one, breath in two, breathe out two.....in nine, out nine. And then you go back to one, breathing in one, breathing out one, breathing in two, breathing out two.....breathing in eight, breathing out eight. And then back to breathing in one, breathing out two.... breathing in seven, out seven, going up to seven this time. And similarly breathing in one breathing out one up to breathing in six, breathing out six. Back to one again, breathing in one, breathing out one, this time up to five, breathing in five, breathing out five. Back to one...up to four....then on to three....then on to two...then breathing in one, breathing out one.

Then you have completed one whole cycle. To be able to do that you have to watch 45 successive breaths. If you complete three cycles of that, you have watched 135 successive breaths. Having completed 3 cycles, you can be assured for yourself that you have completed this first stage of the meditation, that you have sustained awareness on the breath going in and the breath going out. If anywhere during that period a doubt arises in your mind: 'where am I in the

cycle? Am I in the middle of the eights or the sixes or where am I ?' Then you should go back to the very beginning, to the 'breathing in one, breathing out one' of the nines. Only when you complete three of those cycles, without any doubt arising in the mind where you were, you can say to yourself that you have the sustained awareness of the in-and-out breath. Sometimes in the meditation it is hard work because, whether one is very sleepy, or one is far too restless, one cannot keep the attention sustained on the breath. You do go wandering off, you forget where you are. The forgetting where one is, the doubt 'where was I?', is a sign that one has not attained sustained awareness. One has to go back and start again. Going back and starting again is for the Westerner a psychological note to put forth more effort, to brighten the mind, and to develop more careful attention. Because after going back to the beginning a few times one gets very fed up. And that note can create the necessary energy, the necessary care, so that one will gain that first stage of sustaining the attention on the breath. This corresponds in the ānāpānasatisutta to the first two stages of the first tetrad, to: '...a monk who knows: 'The breath going in is a short breath or a long breath; the breath going out is a short breath or a long breath". Breath after breath after breath...

Now once you have that stage fully present, only then, you can go on to the second stage of the meditation, which is increasing the attention on each in-breath and each out-breath. Before, all you needed to know is one or two moments of the in-breath, one or two moments of the out-breath, just enough to give you the sign that the breath is going in or the breath is going out. In the second stage you need the full awareness of the breath. And that is the awareness of the breath from the very moment it starts to go in, continually through the whole process of one in-breath, until the last sensation of the in-breath. And then from the very beginning of an out-breath, one has continual awareness through all stages of the out-breath, until the out-breath fades away and ends. This is called in the ānāpānasatisutta: 'The full awareness of the body of the breath'. This takes a lot of skill, to be able to completely follow the breath.

To be able to do this, the mind has no freedom at all to go wandering away. Just one moment of the minds' wandering away means that one has not achieved the second stage of the meditation. One hasn't had continuous, full awareness of the breath. This is why the stage one of the sustained attention on the in-and out-breath is a stepping stone to stage two. When one can achieve stage two and have full attention on the breath there can be very little other distractions and thoughts present in one's mind. At this stage one may find that distractions, maybe sounds from outside, or maybe physical feelings, even thoughts, that those will manifest to one's conscious experience as things on the edge of one's mind, whereas the experience of breath will be central to one's attention. And as such, those distractions, those sounds or thoughts, or physical feelings, being on the edge as it were, of one's mind, will not have the power to take one's attention away from its focus, the breath. So, one can still say that one has achieved that stage of full awareness of the breath, even though there are some thoughts, as it were, orbiting the centre of your mind, some sounds that you can hear, as it were, in the distance, or some physical feelings, which are a faint echo of what they were before.

The second stage of the meditation, the full awareness of the breath, is very important to attain. It tells that the mind has gained a far deeper stage of *samādhi* than at the end of the first stage. Very often when we are practising meditation we do need these signposts, these clear indications which tell us of where we are in the practice of meditation. You can go to a teacher and you can ask him or her, but you will always be your own best teacher. If you are honestly aware of your meditation and use these signposts, then you can tell for yourself during this meditation retreat how you are going. So you should aim to gain that second stage of the meditation, the full awareness, continuous awareness of each in-and-out breath, sustained over many breaths: 100, 200, 300 breaths.

For those who are experienced meditators here: sometimes when you start to attain this second stage, the mind might feel like it is held on a leash, and

wishes to go off into deeper states of peace. Sometimes at this stage we get, what is called, the '*Samādhi-nimitta*' arising. '*Samādhi-nimitta*' literally means the sign of concentration. This is a mental sign which is an aspect of the breath, and this mental sign in the deeper stages of meditation is crucially important to take you into a *jhāna*. But even though this mental sign, the *Samādhi-nimitta*, might come up early, as you are about to gain the second stage of the meditation, you do well to ignore it and to gain strength in the second stage first of all. It is a common mistake of meditators that before fully accomplishing the second stage in the meditation, that the *Samādhi-nimitta* comes up and they go running after it, when they are not strong enough, when the mind has not sufficient tranquillity. And what happens is, they lose the *Samādhi-nimitta*, they also lose the breath and have to start way down in the early preparatory stages. Wherever one teaches one always looks for similes, and the simile which I dug up for the monks in the monastery, is the simile of the old wheel-cars we used to have as a child. We had cars, little toy cars, with gears inside, and you put them on the ground, and you'd run them on the ground, and you'd run them backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, so that they build up momentum. Only the after the gears inside will be running very fast would you let it go, and it would run all the way to the other end of the room. If you let it go too soon, it would go only a few inches. In a similar way you have to build up this momentum of tranquillity in the second stage before you let it go after the *Samādhi-nimitta*, otherwise you will find that if you do get into deep states of concentration, you will not be able to maintain them. You will go in and come out. There will not be a full experience of the *jhāna*-states. So even though it is hard work, and even though it promises something wonderful and joyful -- this what is, as it were, dangling in front of your mind -- resist this. Just do the hard work of gaining the second stage of meditation, the full awareness on the breath, sustained for a long length of time.

At this stage, where you have the full awareness of the breath, the attention being placed on one thing continuously for such a long length of time, much of ll the distractions would have fallen away. If you had any awareness of the body

left, it is such a distant awareness. All there is, is the breath, and the body -- your legs, your bottom, your back, your arms, your head -- has fallen away, disappeared. This particular stage is called tranquillity of body. The only way you can get tranquillity of body is by taking your attention away from it. As long as your attention stays with the body its demand will not stop, and there will be no tranquillity of body. However, if one places the attention somewhere else, if one places the attention on the experience of breath, and removes the attention from the body completely, one should experience the body disappearing. That body disappearing is a sign of '*kāya-passadhi*', the tranquillity of the body. The tranquillity of the mind will also become manifest. Not a full tranquillity, but much of the movement of the mind has been abandoned. One just has the breath. Any thoughts which are happening at this time should be just concerned about the meditation, about the breath. At this time, when one gets full awareness of the breath, one can still have thoughts; these thoughts are the further directing of the mind, the checking it, and the making sure that awareness is sustained. Here there is still some commentary going on, some orders being given, but the whole area in which such thoughts, such orders, and such commentary occur, is in the region of the task at hand: the sustaining of the awareness of breath.

When you have attained the second stage and you have complete awareness of the breath sustained moment after moment, for many minutes on end, then you can start to do, what the Buddha called, the fourth stage, but what I call the third stage. In the *ānāpānasatisutta*, this would be step four. In this stage you tranquillise the object of your mind, you tranquillise the breath, you calm it down. Calming down the breath can be achieved by suggestion, just the suggestion in the mind: 'Calm down'. At this stage, the mind is already starting to get powerful, and just those few words spoken inside are very often enough to set the breath into the motion of calming down. Another way is to just let go, let go of control, let go of orders, but **don't** let go of the object. Because for those who know the mind very well, you find the very reason that there is any disturbance, the reason why the mind is separated from its natural state of

tranquillity, is because of these orders and commands, many of which your mindfulness is not sufficient to take notice of. If you at this stage start to let go, you experience the breath becoming more subtle, softer, and more hard to discern. The quality of mind which is, as it were, embracing that object starts to become more subtle and refined. You start this marvellous journey of the object getting refined and the mind getting more refined. You start to travel into the deep states of *Samādhi*. When the object becomes refined, its coarser aspects start to disappear. The physical aspects of the breath start to disappear, and the mind begins to perceive the mental aspects of the breath. That mental aspect of the breath becomes what we call the '*Samādhi-nimitta*'.

Again, trying to use a simile from the external world, it's like looking at an apple. When you first look at an apple, you see many aspects of that fruit, its shape, its colour, maybe even smell, its fragrance. After a while, you pick up only one aspect, just - say - its fragrance, its smell, until that is all that you can see and the rest of the apple disappears. This is what you do with the breath. At first in the second stage you have the whole breath there. The usual experience of the breath, even though it is sustained and pretty calm. Then one aspect of that experience will start to grow, and all other aspects will start to fade. The aspect which grows and becomes more prominent is the mental sign, the mental aspect of the breath, the *samādhi-nimitta*.

To help you at this stage, I use a skilful means which is to look for the beautiful breath. Just by suggesting to yourself: 'Look for the beautiful breath.', you will start to see that aspect of the breath which is indeed very beautiful and very attractive, because at this stage the breath is already pretty calm. Beauty is an aspect of the breath which had always been there, but because of other coarser factors of the breath one wasn't perceiving it. By suggesting to the mind: 'Look for the beautiful breath.', at this stage of having completed stage two and going on to stage three of this meditation, it will very often manifest to you. Again, saying 'beautiful breath' may not mean very much to you, but if at the second

stage you look for the beautiful breath, then you will find it and you will know what I mean. Again , it is the *samādhi-nimitta* which manifests as the beautiful breath, the delightful breath, the attractive breath, the blissful breath. In a short while, that description 'beautiful breath' changes, the breath disappears and there is just the beautiful, just the attractive, just the lovely. Because here you start to go into the world of the mind.

At this point you have to be very careful not to take in your labels and judgements from the external world, because they do not fit this world of the mind. And you have to let go of these and explore a world which is fascinating and sometimes fearful. It is fearful only because we do not know it. It is not dangerous, in fact it is most beneficial, for both body and mind. However, because we do not know it well fear can come up. And if fear comes up it can shatter the peace of our meditation very quickly, and take us away back to the earlier stages. So be wary of fear, and if you start to see it coming up, then through faith, through confidence, through hearing other monks, nuns, other meditators, who ensure there is nothing to fear, you can go just that one step further, and just test out that deeper state of peace. As you just take one step further, you will be able to notice that this is safe and that this feels good. Take one more step further, this also feels good. It's only by just that one step further and reassessing that one can overcome this fear, which is one of the major obstacles for entering these deep states of mind. If one can calm the object of the breath down, then look for the beautiful breath, and that beautiful breath will start to manifest. It is a joyful experience, a beautiful experience, and that beautiful experience will be the vehicle which takes you into the *jhāna*.

As far as jhānas are concerned, I will be talking about those later in this meditation retreat. But, the preliminary instructions are to gain stage one, which is sustained awareness on the in-and-out breath, one after the other. Then once you have the stage one, stage two is full awareness of the breath, from the very beginning of an in-breath to its end, beginning of an out-breath to its end,

sustained over a long period. Once that is fully attained, then calm the object of the mind down, look for the beautiful breath. I will give more instructions on what to do later.

As far as the walking meditation is concerned, in order to bring the walking meditation in line with this way of sitting meditation: when you walk, you can consider the first stage to be the continuous awareness of every step, every left step and every right step. One step after the other you should know, without missing one step. If you can walk ten cycles backwards and forwards on your path without missing one left step, without missing one right step, then you can say to yourself that you have completed stage one. Then increase the attention, so that you notice every feeling, every aspect of the left step, from the very beginning when the left foot starts to move and lifts itself off the ground. All of the movements as it goes up, and goes forward, and goes down, and takes the way. And that continuous process of the left step, and the continuous awareness of the right step, from the very beginning of the steps to their end without missing a movement, sustain that over walking backwards and forwards, maybe, ten cycles. Then one can say that one has the full awareness of walking. So much so that the process of walking will fully occupy the attention, the mind cannot be distracted. You know if this happens, because the mind goes into a state of samādhi, sustained attention, and it becomes peaceful. Even the sound of the birds disappears as your attention is fully taken up on the experience of walking. Your attention is concentrated on one thing, sustained on one thing, it is settled on one thing. You will find this a very pleasant experience indeed. So if you can, as it were, reflect the sitting meditation with the walking meditation, and every other thing you do today. If it is eating, the first stage will be every spoon, or forkful which you put in your mouth, you know. From the very beginning of lifting up the fork and putting food in the mouth, the chewing, the swallowing, every aspect of eating you should know. You do not need to do this slowly. But, you need to do it mindfully and carefully. So your full awareness is on what you are doing. Then you are not wasting time on any of the necessary duties which we have to

do towards the body. This is sufficient instruction for now. Are there any questions about this method of meditation, this method of *Samatha*?

(Question inaudible)

You are asking, if you are noticing the breath at one particular part of the body, sometimes that noticing at one particular part of the body becomes more evident in another part of the body. Should you then move over to that part of the body and follow the breath around? Now the answer to that is usually: If you follow the breath around the body, you find that you will not get that much peace, and your *Samādhi* is getting too distracted, too active. This is one of the problems with noticing the breath at one particular part of the body. Usually the meditation teacher will say: 'No, do not follow the breath around, stay at that one place, the place where it most usually manifests.'. However, what happens when you do that is you don't notice any breath at all. The breath has disappeared from there, and that is why this is a cause for the mind wandering off. To counter that problem I advise you to experiment with not being concerned where the breath is actually registered on the body. Just know, just have your perception concerned with, not where the breath is manifesting, but whether it's going in or going out, and what stage of going in or out it is. So do not concern the perception with the place in the body, just be concerned with where in the cycle of breathing your breath is right now and you will solve that problem. Just ask a practical question. Close your eyes and ask yourself: 'Am I breathing in or am I breathing out?'. The answer to that question will occur to you before you notice where the breath is positioned on the body. You don't need to ask the second question: 'Where is the breath on the body?'. Sufficient is to answer the question: 'Where is the breath in its cycle?'.

The perception of the mind can sometimes have too much data, and that can confuse the mind. Here the data for our perception is just where the breath is in its cycle. Exactly how the breath feels, whether its comfortable or uncomfortable you don't need to consider now. You don't need to consider where is it in the

body, instead you consider where is it in its cycle. Just that much and no more.

(Question inaudible)

Just turning around, and then walking backwards. Again, as one turns around, that has to be part of the walking meditation. So, as one turns around one notices every step. If one can notice every step, then that is completing stage one. If one can notice every movement which makes up one step as one turns around, then that is the full awareness of the object which is the moving of the feet. So I hope you can understand where this is coming from. One is developing a sustained, awareness on a chosen object. That sustained awareness is achieved stage by stage. First of all, it is not full awareness, but it is: notices, enough, goes away again, notices, comes back again and notices. When you are watching the breath, one should notice an in-breath, the attention can go off to something else for a short while, but it has to come back by the next out-breath. And once it notices, it can go off a little way, but has to come back by the next in-breath. So what you are doing is that you are restricting how long the attention can go away. This is stage one. In stage two, the attention can not go away at all. It is like putting a person in prison: first of all you just accustom a person to prison by just making sure they visit once a day. Just for 5 minutes. Then they come 5 minutes every day, then you increase it to 10 minutes every day, and then you keep them inside all day, every day -- but it is a very lovely prison you go in!

(Question inaudible)

Yes, you're saying that when you're aware of the breath, at the same time another part of the mind could be thinking. We have to be careful of that one, because what may be happening there is one of two things : either your mind may be aware of the breath, then be going somewhere else, then come back again quickly, and then going somewhere else. It can be a mind that is going backwards and forwards very fast, in which case you never get to any stillness.

Or, the other thing, it could be that the mind is centred on the breath, but you are aware of other things around the object. Just like you when are looking at me right now, you can also be aware of the monk sitting next to me, the shrine behind me, and other things to the left, right and above. However, in order to accomplish the object of this meditation, if you find you can be aware of the breath and other things as well, make sure that the awareness of the breath is so important that it's central on the mind and the other things are, as it were, orbiting around the outside. They are not central to the screen which is the mind. If you do that, then you'll find that because the breath is central, if you sustain the central focus on the breath, the other things will disappear. In just the same way you can do this experiment visually and just, say, look at the Buddha-statue. Notice that first you are aware of the big wall around it, the shrine underneath it, and the flowers to the left and the right. But if you keep continuous staring at that Buddha-statue, you will find that other things just fall away. And after 5 minutes, maybe 10 minutes, all you can see is the Buddha-statue. You can't even see the flowers to the left and the right. That is just the way of attention. If you sustain the attention on something, then the other things to the left and the right, above and below, disappear, as the mind shrinks onto its focus. Just like you watch the TV at night, when you first turn it on, you can see the control, you can see the things to either side, but after a while you can see actually 'TV', if the attention just goes to its focus. But if you are aware of the breath and many other things, at least for the time, then make sure that the breath is right central in the mind, and that other things are on the outside. If you do that, then other things will disappear. However, if you centre the mind on those other thoughts, then the breath disappears, it falls off the screen of the mind. Now does that make sense to you?

Meditation is to get full awareness of the breath, and if there is to be anything else in the mind at all, it is just a few thoughts, feelings, or any perceptions, just about the breath, as if there is nothing else in the world. Now, are there any other questions on this so far? This just gives a true indication of what the method is... (end of recording).

In order to fit the printed version a few stylistic changes had to be made. The transcribers apologise for any errors or inaccuracies in the text.



(2) Sermon for the Day of August Full Moon

This is the full moon day of the month of Nikini, i.e. August and I know our listeners are ready for a Buddhist sermon. In a sermon I wish to talk to people. And when I talk it must make sense to me and to those who listen. Therefore I wish to pick up a subject with an immediate relevance to mankind, irrespective of where they live and what they are accustomed to believe in. My listeners may be Buddhists, non-Buddhists or anyone at that. The Buddha word falls fruitful in the ear of anyone. This is in fact how the Buddha opened his mission to the world. " Open for them are the doors to deathlessness. Those who have ears to hear, let them give credence to what I say. " The Ariyapariyesana Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya puts it as *Aparuta tesam amatassa dvara ye sotavanto pamuncantu saddham*. [M.1.169]. At least on a day like this, a full moon day which comes only once a month, it would do good to all of us to relax and to take time to think of ourselves. It makes much more sense to the Buddhist than making a prayer for peace in death. The Buddha has enjoined on us to do this as a daily habit when in the verse No.157 of the Dhammapada he tells us thus. " He who knows that he loves himself, he should take good care of himself. At least during one of the three watches of the night let him be circumspect and keep vigil over himself. " Did you know that your little companion volume the Dhammapada had a verse like this for you? Check it yourself today, and if you have any doubt you are invited to adress yourself to me.

Now over to our sermon. Let us ask ourselves what we have been doing with ourselves all our life. Ask in fact, in a historical perspective, what mankind has

been doing over the centuries and over the millennia. With only a little more than six years for the turn of the century, from the twentieth to the twentyfirst, it means that men, with their recorded history, has lived on this earth for well over three millennia. Both the eastern and western hemispheres of the world bear testimony to this. The architects and engineers of the Nile Valley civilization in Africa, the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru in North and South Americas respectively, certainly had made great headway in the direction of science and technology. So it was nearer home in Asia, in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. The Chinese who made the world wiser with their theories of Yin Yang claim as much antiquity as the other contestants in the field.

Often and on we are told about advances in civilization. Men born on this earth have gone, in their process of development, well beyond theories of a flat earth and a sun and moon placed above it. Long before the first landings on the moon during the second half of this century, the Indians had known of the Expanding Universe. In the study of cosmic evolution, the **Big Bang** and the **Big Crunch** are concepts of fairly recent origin. We in Asia, particularly the Sri Lankans who are often amazed and astonished at the so-called supersonic achievements of the rest of the world, should know, with a legitimate sense of pride, their own greatness in certain specific areas.

In this sphere of outer space science, Buddhist texts like the Agganna Sutta of the Digha Nikaya speak very clearly of these twin concepts of the Big Bang and the Big Crunch, although not in identical terms, when they speak of the ***Vivatta Kappa*** and ***Sanvatta Kappa***. Vivatta, as any one of you should know, means the opening out or unfolding of the universe. Sanvatta as its opposite means the closing in process. This awareness of the origin of the universe and its pattern of behaviour, with numerous grades of world systems or *lokadhatu* as is known to the Buddhist books, give those within it a new sense of direction in relation to mankind as a whole. Many serious thinkers in many parts of the world are now moving into this realm of thinking, in preference to a narrower view of

willed creation.

To make a success of his life in the world, man has to discover a realistic and meaningful philosophy of life. With our Buddhist background let us now turn in that direction. Man has come into being and he lives in this world, governed by his own relationships to one another and to the world in which he is placed. In the groups we live in, large or small, we find that our responsibility is primarily to one another, here and now. It is much less to a world beyond or to a person or power elsewhere. In the Buddhist concept of man and the universe, this is something we must not lose sight of. This is why in one of the major concepts of Buddhism, namely love, the word we use is *maitri*. It is the friendly, non-hostile relationship of one living thing to another, man or animal. It is not one of subordination in any form. Therefore it is often translated as Universal Loving Kindness, unbounded, infinite and extensive. It is enjoined on all mankind to practise, without any thoughts of rewards in return. Whatever be the fancies of the poets, love needs no picture of a red heart to be pierced in the centre with an arrow, whether the arrow is offered by Cupid in the west or Ananga in the east.

The urge for the practice of this wholesome quality of love or *maitri* [Pali *metta*] runs through the entire gamut of Buddhism. The Metta Sutta, which is well and truly something more than a protective chant against the misdoings of evil spirits, clearly enunciates with the words *Karaniyam attha-kusalena* that whosoever is skilled in making a success of his life in terms of this world as well as of higher spiritual attainments anywhere, should learn to cultivate infinite love for the whole world. He is, as *Atthakusala*, the one who is endowed with skilful means to success. And the Sutta specifies it thus: *Mettan ca sabbalokasmim manasam bhavaye aparimanam*. A talisman, if people of the world need it against calamitous assaults of evil spirits, let them find it more in the practice of love in this manner rather than in a chant about love by any one else.

This necessity to foster healthy inter-personal relationships in the human community is highly reckoned with in Buddhist ethics. It is born of mutual respect

and love for the others. In the rightly famous Veludvareyya Sutta, the Buddha admonishes the people of Veludvara or Bamboo Gate that the truly valid basis for the cultivation of wholesome ethics and sound moral values is the ability to place oneself in the position of another. This is called *attupanayika*. In other words, he says, treat others exactly as you would like others to treat you. Injure not or kill not others because you would not like to be injured or killed. In that jewel of a book of Buddhist Ideas, the Dhammapada, the verses 129 and 130 put this idea beautifully as *Attanam upamam katva na haneyya na ghataye*: Putting oneself in the position of others, one should kill not and injure not. And again as the Dhammapada puts it *Sabbe tasanti dandassa sabbesam jivitam piyam*: All dread the rod and life is dear to all .

As we look into this concept of universal love for everything that exists, once again we find a good many people in the world gradually turning in this direction of thinking, extending their love of life even to the world of animals. Here is Linda McCartney in her FOREWORD to a book entitled SAVE THE ANIMALS by Peter Singer, Barbara Dover and Ingrid Newkirk [1991]. Listen to what she has to say.

Of course, anyone who cares about animals must stop eating animals. Just the thought of what happens in a slaughterhouse is enough. We stopped eating meat the day we happened to look out of our window during Sunday lunch and saw our young lambs playing happily, as kittens do, in the fields. Eating bits of them suddenly made no sense. In fact, it was revolting.

The Buddha, in his admonition to the people of the Bamboo Gate, uses this sublime concept of love for others as implied in *maitri* and the mutual concern and respectfulness which he likes people to develop among themselves. He gets this into the very living process of people via his idea of *attupanayika* or **respect for the other**. He tries on this basis of reciprocity to inculcate thereby the much needed standard moral virtues in society like respect for life, respect for the legitimate possessions of people and propriety of behaviour in sex relationships. Remember the Bamboo Gate dwellers were not Buddhists to begin with. They

had a rather down to earth way of living very much in comfort and in luxury. But they also had a measure of religious aspirations in their thinking. They sought to be reborn in heaven after death.

The Buddha primarily wanted to make good men and good women out of them. For it was difficult to forget that people had their roots here in the world in which they lived. It was equally improper not to think so. Misdeeds through speech and action, the Buddha argued, had to be done away with first. For nobody ever wanted these to be done unto themselves. Goodness, born of the conviction of the need to be good, is what matters most in society. Through that goodness, the humans will liberate themselves. The Buddha affirmed to the good men of Bamboo Gate that they would get their lift-off from the world through that and that they would get into orbit in the direction of Nirvana thereafter. They would be their own saviours, without any other having to die for them.

It is only people with this degree of social concern and social accountability who would see the greatness in the Buddha and his teaching. It is they who would opt to take the *tisarana*, i.e. refuge in the Buddha, his teaching and his exemplary body of accomplished disciples. The people of Veludvara opted to do so. When people are firmly founded and grounded on these, they never have the need to cling on to minor volunteers who crop up on the wayside, making promises for this world and the other, claiming that they are an amalgam of all good religions in the world. Please remember Buddhism shall never have the need to be reinforced or replaced with rebuilt tyres. Buddhism cannot accommodate within its salvation scheme those who descend from heaven to save the humans. Buddhism which totally rejects the idea of a Supreme Divinity [*Anabhissaro*], cannot by any stretch of imagination contain within it manifestations or *Avatars* of the Divine.

The Buddha's reliance on what he offers as the voluntary reformation of man through his own magnanimous and philanthropic change of heart, an offer which appears to have totally convinced the people of Bamboo Gate, is one of the

greatest contributions Buddhism can make to the world today. Over-extended concepts of self-righteousness in many areas to which the humans everywhere in the world seem to tenaciously cling underly the inflamability of many world situations which today are more than visibly smouldering. Infallible correctness of political ideologies which are more imagined than real as is being proved to the world today by the revisionist moves of diverse political groups and power blocs, keenly contests with forms of fundamentalist religious fanaticism . With them, it is more or less a foregone conclusion that others have hardly a right to survive. At world level, this has led to suicidal fraternal encounters within groups themselves which externally claim homogeneity and singleness of paternity - brotherhood of this and brotherhood of that. Political power blocs and religious states, no matter where they are originally conceived, become menacing to world peace in their expansion. The sanity and wisdom with which the humans are believed to be endowed should be adequate to discern the self- destructive folly of such forms of arrogance. In the interests of world peace and human rights such violent thrusts must be contained within reasonably safe boundaries. The world has witnessed from time to time the ravages of such arrogance propelled by notions of supremacy tied up with political ideologies, religious superiority and ethnic identities. Judged by the advancement of thinking in the world today, real or alleged, this kind of aberrated human thinking is truly lamentable.

This being the world situation today in terms of clashes of political ideologies, religious supremacies and ethnic divergences, nearer home or further away from home, let us on an occasion like this turn our attention towards the possible comfort we can derive from religion. Buddhism has a recorded history of more than twenty-five centuries, stretching more or less from the shores of the Caspian Sea in western Asia up to the Japanese Archipelago in the east. If you need real recorded evidence, here we are. Dating far back more than a thousand years, the Islamic historian Abu'l-Rayhan Muhammad al-Biruni says " In former times Khorasan, Persia, Iraq, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria was Buddhistic..."

Archaeological evidence by way of sculpture and painting from places like Hadda and Bamiyan in Afghanistan, further testify this. Afghanistan provides not only colossal Buddha statues in places like Bamiyan but also provides sermons in stone, literally, from places like Hadda. Some of these date back to about 2nd century of the Christian era. So was Buddhism's success in the oasis settlements on the famous Silk Route, on the northern and southern flanks of today's Gobi desert. It was through a depth of conviction, and not the pressure of conversion at the point of the sword, that these people patronised and held in high esteem not only the teachings of the Buddha but also everything else that were religiously connected with it.

All this was possible because of the depth of the humanitarian profundity in the teachings of the Buddha. Humans of the world who are visibly present before us, stand in one common brotherhood for that very reason. On humanity pure and simple, ethnic and religious labels are but narrowly conceived superimpositions. The moment they assume the right not only to survive but also to supercede at the expense of those with a different identity, the creators of such groups have necessarily to be brought before anything like Nuremberg trials.

Ethnic and religious diversity in the human community is admittedly a reality. It is no less real than the endless chains of motor vehicles on a metropolitan highway during the rush hour. See how beautifully they go, with minimum damage to one another. For a highway code is known to exist in their cultural context and the law enforcement authorities are known to be firm on any infringement. I know and I admit that the simile of driving on a metropolitan highway is less true and less applicable in Sri Lanka. But it also appears to be true that with less good roads and less good drivers, relatively more vehicles per hour seem to be plying on our roads. This is where we are driven to admit that controls and controlling regulations have to be brought in when and where necessary.

Let us look carefully now. Are we not at the crossroads right now? Delay not.

It is the time to judge and decide, and do that wisely. This means that power blocs in pursuance of political ideologies or religious groups with self-assigned divine missions shall not ride rough-shod over masses of people, tempting them with gifts of the world and exploiting their credulity. Redemption or salvation in a mundane and worldly sense does not necessarily have to be a tearing off of people from their cultural context, labelling their background as being outdated or outmoded. More than half the world today is convinced that too much updating in thinking and too much updating of life styles of people has resulted in their completely losing their bearings. Even in the so-called developed countries like America where the white population is still in the majority, the conviction is gaining ground that the extended family system of the Afro-American people there is a very desirable element in any social system. At least, they believe, it is not to be tampered with. This, I give you as a single sample. Why should it not be in other parts of the world as well?

Dear listeners. This is an excellent context in which to turn in the direction of our own religious background . Buddhism, and mind you Buddhism of more than twenty-five centuries ago, and without any updating and without any modernised interpretations, has countenanced such traumatic situations of political struggles at global level. In the Buddhist books of the earliest stratum we have the beautifully narrated story of the Universal Monarch or Cakkavatti King who gains control over the entire earth without shedding even a single drop of blood. I would not personally hesitate to classify such stories in the category of religious myths and legends. But what matters more is the manner in which such stories are structured. That reflects the aspirations of a people who gave rise to such myths and legends. They highlight their cultural foundations and their religious motivations.

The Buddhist tradition tells us that the Universal Monarch gets all regions of the earth, east, west, north and south under his command without any use of force or arms. All regional rulers who automatically come under his sway, appear

before him in the most joyous spirit of submission, seeking instructions to rule the land which they choose to offer unto him [*Anusasa maharaja. Sakan ' te maharaja*]. With a decent sense of justice, the Universal Monarch reinvests the land in them, asking them to rule as they did before [*Yathabhuttan ca bhunjatha.*], but with one proviso that they establish the moral order of *pancasila*, of respect for life and respect for property, etc. within their territories. The hallmark of quality for any brand of politics in terms of Buddhist thinking is that they uphold justice and guard the moral order so that people, as the subjects who are ruled, are the prime beneficiaries. What good does the brand names of political ideologies do unto people without social justice and consideration of human rights in the lands where the reign supreme?

What I have endeavoured to do so far is to present some aspects of Buddhism as a living reality which has an impact on the human community. Right in our midst here and not elsewhere and right now and not at a later date to come. It would not be incorrect to say that in certain sectors and in certain regions too much of the opium of religion has gone into the heads of people, enabling them on the one hand to be indifferent to the urgent problems of humanity like poverty, starvation and disease down here, with the promise of a solution elsewhere. Or on the other, to use force and violence, even causing death and destruction to alter the patterns of thinking of other people. In the alternative, guiling enticements are offered to the less affluent people of the so-called developing countries which in the socio-political set-ups of many countries pass off as reformative and stimulative assistance towards development.. It is time that more people develop a keener vision to be able to see a spade as a spade and call it so.



(3) Are We on the Right Track?

(TV Program - November Full Moon Day 17. 11. 94)

Dear listeners. Welcome to our program today. It is our intention to talk on the subject **Are we on the right track?**

Counting more than three score years and ten since I was born into this world between two world wars, I could lay hands on many things that have happened in the world, including Sri Lanka, that would compel me to answer in the negative and say **No. We are not.** This is of course not to deny the achievements of the humans in the field of science and technology. But with all that, has the quality of human thinking become any better, serving a better purpose?

You know it as much as I do that somebody somewhere took a decision and dropped the Atom bomb on Hiroshima. That brought the war to an end and the Allies won the World War II. It made world history. But the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the consequent human devastation made us alive to a new phase of history in the world. In this context, however, we have not looked for a new word like Machiavelli. We tend to gloss over situations. But the scientist who had pioneered the manipulation of the atom lamented as to why he ever did it.

The world still has enough such men of sense and sanity who in the inner depths of their hearts feel what pain, suffering and sorrow are, sense the insanity of lives destroyed and property damaged for victory's sake. But men also have the genius of the devil to clear up the ravages of war, present a new peaceful front, and mount deadlier weapons for the self same purpose. This can happen anywhere in the world.

Right here let us use a Buddhist norm to detect the correctness or otherwise, the right and wrong of what we do. Let not wisdom of man grow out of proportion

to the good and glory it can bring upon mankind. Here I quote to you from your handy manual, the **Dhammapada**, verse No. 72. If you have no copy of it on your shelf, please collect one today and keep it at hand. You will need it every moment of your life, for every situation you run into. It has been the solace of my life and continues to do so.

*Yāvadeva anathāya ñattaṃ bālassa jāyate
hanti bālassa sukkaṃsaṃ muddhaṃ assa nipātayaṃ.*

For ill and ill alone does the wisdom of the fool grow.
It blasts off the goodness of his life
And crashes him headlong to the ground.

Life of man today, when compared to what it was fifty years ago, seems to present an endless chain of problems on account of its contemporary multi-faceted character. The very physical being of man, in relation to itself and the community or society in which it finds itself placed, poses numerous problems with regard to its healthy continuance, its personal security and safeguard, its own organic growth and decay.

Facing and meeting these problems and solving them is a painful process. We must ask ourselves the honest question **Do we seriously wish to face our problems and solve them? Do we ever understand that we have problems at all?** What most of us consciously or unconsciously attempt to do is to avoid them, and like Horatio Nelson at the Battle of Waterloo, put the telescope to the blind eye, and cleverly and wisely declare a real non-existence of the very really existing problems.

But if one views this situation with adequate detachment, one has to reckon with the fact that this avoidance of problems only results in an increase of their intensity. And also in a reduction of the strength to face them and solve them. It is really a growth reduction. Can man afford it? On the one hand, it retards

emotional growth. For it is the real facing of situations which stimulates emotional growth. It gives young people, or even older ones, more maturity and a greater capacity to withstand.

On the other, the best of psychologists of the world today admit that one's inherited value-systems are cooperative in problem solving. This area, they call the spiritual growth. We would not mind calling it the religio-cultural contribution. We in Sri Lanka do not still need to fight shy of the word **religion**, although religion is getting heavily corroded day after day with too much of intolerable extra stuff. In the name of religion, we are turning in the direction of too many petty and frivolous mundane sources of support, for more wealth, for better health and even greater gaiety, merely because these sources are made to look cultic and mysterious by fooling our own vision, our hearing and many of our sense organs.

To the Buddhist who is serious about being a Buddhist, his or her religio-cultural value system is a vast store-house. One could draw upon it for a mere asking. One does not need to enter into any promissory contracts of *būra hāra* with any agent, human or divine, in order to have his or her problems put right. Buddhist religio-cultural values are not built up on divine revelations, but on provable down-to-earth realities which draw their validity from facts of human experience.

In Buddhism, problem solving is a scientific process of first correctly identifying a problem, and then proceeding to scan and discern the causes and conditions which bring it about. This is the fundamental Buddhist principle of **causal genesis** or *idappaccayatī*. Here we need to hasten to publicize a **correction note** that Buddhism does not uphold a theory of *karma* which ascribes all miseries and painful situations of human life, here and now, to misdeeds of a previous life or as is referred to in the Buddhist texts: *sabbaṃ vedayitaṃ pubbekatahetu*. A devastating bomb blast, aided by perfect technical know-how of foreign or local origin, is nothing but the outcome of a well planned

machination, precisely described in Buddhist texts as *opakkamika* or devised by some one. If one learns to view such situations in the world in this manner and at least apprehend the possibility of such danger, one is then forewarned to some measure to be reasonably forearmed.

In the human community today, men and women are becoming a problem. A big problem indeed. We have often heard it said that 'child is the father of man'. If so let us take our problem men and women back to their childhood for regrooming. That is really the task before us today. But it is indeed going to be more difficult than the bringing back to earth of the **Spaceship Thirteen** which failed halfway in its outward journey to the moon.

Buddhism handles these problems in advance. Let us see whether we could briefly present the Buddhist thesis with regard to child rearing or bringing up children. It is both precise and comprehensive. We are tellingly reminded that the failure to carry it out successfully is to send the entire society haywire. In a beautiful simile we are told that it is as though the pins which keep the wheels of a running chariot in position have given way [*rathassāṇī' va yāyato*]. Imagine the plight of the chariot or of those who take their ride in it.

Four items are listed in this recipe for good child care. Parental concern towards children in attending to their basic needs of food and clothing heads the list. This immediately provides in the child mind a sense of security in terms of his needs, a sense of adequacy of being cared for. This undoubtedly is a major area of silent expression of love, of love without words, love made available indirectly and unostentatiously. This is vividly expressed under the term *dāna* or gifting.

Next comes *peyyavajja* or use of loving words in handling children. This is the vocal assurance of the parental concern for the children. The gifts of food and clothing et cetera would certainly be gratifying to the growing up young ones, but that would not adequately register in them the parental love until they have had the opportunity to receive it face to face. The mutuality of the home community

would not commence its outflow in either direction, from parent to children or children to parent until stirred up with loving words, first from the elder to the younger. Mere puppetry or shadow plays in the home between parents and children or inadequacy of loving communication in the home would lead to disastrous sterility of healthy relations within the family. The children need to feel that they are valued by the parents.

Disciplining and guidance of children by parents comes as the third in the list and is called ***atthacariyā***. It literally means 'looking after the welfare of' and amounts to a process of counseling. This also implies parents being with their children, watching them and guiding their entire living process.

Finally comes ***samānattatī*** or harmoniously fitting into the emotional fluctuations of the growing community in the home. Whether it be in situations of stress and strain when children get severely crushed and damaged or in moments of joy and elation when children are likely to overbalance, it is best for children to have wiser counsel of their parents, as persons in whom they have a greater trust and as persons to whom they can look up to with confidence for safe guiding. This is a position which parents can reach only through adequate devotion and dedication and selfless commitment. It has to be meaningfully appreciated by parents that two major demands that would be made of them as parents would be their offer of infinite love to their offspring for their growth as healthy humans and their offer of unmeasured lengths of time for their precise guidance and correction.

These go under the distinguished name of ***satara saṅgraha vastu***. And no parent can afford to bring up his children to be worthy members of the human community without paying adequate heed to these.



(4) TV Programme - December Full Moon Day

Welcome to all of you. Today is the Unduvap Poya day. It is the last full moon day of the year. And with it we wind up the year 1994, a peak year for Sri Lankans for more reasons than one. Individually and collectively, how much have you thought, with adequate responsibility, of the events which have been taking place in our island country?

In Sri Lanka, as well as in the world outside, many things have happened during the last two or three decades, which shock humanity to its very rock bottom. Massive destruction of human life for very petty reasons of caste, creed and religious and worthless political considerations, total disregard for environmental decay brought about through suicidal projects of industrialisation and national development, as well as many other thrusts of impulsive action are threatening our very survival on this planet.

The threatened disintegration of the ozone belt in the outer sphere above, thus endangering human life on earth, is only one such example. And here is another, and I quote from a recent publication called **The Biophilia Hypothesis** [1993]: **The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.** To many in this part of the world, these warnings do not become visible until they have totally eaten into our innermost core, until they are discovered to be too late and incurably cancerous.

All these observations imply that the humans who predominantly occupy this planet need to rethink about their present life styles if they are to avert a serious crisis, almost of cosmic magnitude, which would lead to the total elimination of life on earth. Fortunately many serious thinkers in different parts of the world, irrespective of the religious or cultural traditions to which they belong, are paying due attention to this. They include great scientists, psychologists and

philosophers and religious thinkers who genuinely have in mind the unity of mankind and the total good that can come upon man by a new line of concerted thinking, perhaps still conforming to their own cultural traditions and patterns.

We have had the good luck to lay hands on several such books published recently in America and elsewhere. More than a year ago, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk by the name of Thich Nhat Hanh, together with several other collaborators, brought out a book with a fascinating title. It reads **For a Future to be Possible** and it carries the sub-title **Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts**. What is striking about the book is that somebody could immediately come forward to point out that the Vietnamese author is a Mahayana monk. This has already happened.

But let me place before you some of the views expressed from yet another angle, using the thoughts of Thich Nhat Hanh as a real valid basis to work for amelioration of human suffering on earth. Here is Maxine Hong Kingston writing in this same volume his essay on **Precepts for the Twentieth Century [For A Future To Be Possible** p. 90 f.].

After the Buddha gave the Five Precepts to the world, there have been many editions and translations, trying for language that would enlighten minds in changing times and places. Thich Nhat Hanh has written a strong version; it will inspire us and our difficult end-of-the-Twentieth-Century world. His thinking has gone through fire - war in and out-side of Vietnam, the destruction and building of communities, the conditions of life in the East and in the West. These then are the precepts of Buddhism as they have evolved through the most exacting tests.

Here we have to view with unquestionable admiration the manner in which he views his teacher's [Thay's] presentation of the Five Precepts. Thay has named the precepts "wonderful" - the Five Wonderful Precepts. Wonderful because they have lived for more than 2,500 years, through holocausts and devastations.

Wonderful because they are a practicable, useful map and working plan for our lives in the real world. They teach us to **effect that world with methods that are reasonable, logical, ethical - no impossible magic here** [Emphasis mine].

Wonderful because they can protect us, and show us how to live a joyous life, an interesting, adventurous, deep, large life and how to be with one another, and with animals, plants, and all the Earth and universe.

Wonderful because **when we practice the precepts, we existentially become humane, we embody loving kindness** [Emphasis mine again].

I would call upon everyone of you to step out of the unduly narrowed thinking in terms of this or that brand of Buddhism and go a little beyond. Think with admiration of the vastness of his vision and the benevolence underlying it. Divorced of sectarian parochial outlook, Thich Nhat Hanh as well as his collaborators are looking at a human problem. They are concerned with the safety and security of humans on earth. They are striving for peace on earth and good will among men.

My interest today is to place this new thinking before you. We need update nothing in the real original teaching of the Buddha. Thich Nhat Hanh and his collaborators themselves all fall back on the teaching of the Buddha. Yet they realise that during its twenty-five centuries of spread over throughout the world, Buddhism has stretched through immense areas of time and space. They also have discovered that testing Buddhism against this backdrop, most of Buddhist fundamental teachings, and its cultural institutions have not only survived through this long period, but also show that they possess sufficient vitality and vibrancy to be almost eternal in their validity and usefulness to the world.



(5) SLBC - Has Buddhism the Answer?

1. Two areas which have put human thinking in the world today into an alarming turmoil are:
 - A. Feminist activism
 - B. Freedom of sex

During nearly two years of travel abroad, both east and west, you would have seen these forces face to face. To begin with, would you please enlighten us with regard to the first item, namely feminist activism.
2. With the Women's Liberation movement gaining momentum, would you consider freedom of sex as coming in its wake? What are your impressions of this from the angle of the western world?
3. At world level, we cannot ignore the problem of intoxicants in the world today. Along with it has also come the drugs. As a university teacher of many years standing, both in this country and abroad, what are your observations on this problem?
4. What are your comments on the concept of the home or the family as a desirable and conveniently manageable social unit?
5. Considering the ethnic and religious diversities in the world today, how could religions and religious propaganda be put to good humanitarian use?

Ven. Professor Dhammavihari
Siri Vajiranana Dharmayatanaya
Maharagama



(6) Ketumati Buddhist Vihara Special Dhamma

Sermons

Summarised below is the contents of the Special Dhamma Sermon No.1 delivered during the Rains Retreat / 2007 at Ketumati Buddhist Vihara / Manchester.

We commenced our series of Special Dhamma Sermons with the sermon on Behaviour of the Human and Moral Goodness in the World. In the society we live, no matter in which part of the world, we are related to one another, in our behaviour through thought, word and deed, even though in an unconscious or involuntary manner. The way we think, and the way we render our thoughts into action, commencing with those at the head of states and religious institutions, and even the small fry at the very bottom, they do impact all life in the world, including man, animal and plant.

Today, this message of current human behaviour, both good and evil, is flashed globally, almost with the rapidity of light and sound, and it reaches everyone everywhere unhindered. And we humans react immediately, either gleefully accepting those words and deeds according to our own loyalties ingrained within us, in terms of our religious, ethnic and political identities. Or we are both injured and angered and dart forth into retaliatory action with daggers drawn, to fight and eliminate those who cross our path. This is what collectively destroys basic moral goodness, and consequently human happiness in the world today.

Two and a half millennia ago, the Buddha saw this pattern of obnoxious human behaviour like killing, robbing and plundering, sexual abuses and improprieties etc. as something invariable, like the story of Adam of old and the fruits of the forbidden tree. They affect us both individually and socially. The Buddha, forestalling it as it were, gave to the world the basic ethics of *pañca-sīla* to minimize their ravaging disasters. These ethics would indeed be, at any time, found to be globally applicable. We would indicate the emergence now of this

awareness once again in the world, both in the East and the West. The first ethic of *pāṇātipātā-veramaṇī* or universal respect for all life now seems to be showing itself up both courageously and successfully in areas like Philosophy and Religion. In certain circles, Christianity is seen meaningfully submitting the idea that God did not create man first and thereafter the animal world on second thoughts, placing it at the disposal of man for his utilization and consumption. Bio-Ethics Professor Peter Singer of Australia and many others are sponsoring the same idea, differently though, through books like *Save Animals*, *Animal Liberation* etc. throughout the world. The plea of new scientific writings like *Biophilia Hypothesis* is not very different. Their theme is 'pay adequate heed to these words and survive on this planet or disregard them and perish'. The United Nations's territory, being understandably what it is, has taken up safeguards in this direction, even belatedly, and that solely for the security of human life. Even in this, its effective functioning seems to be still in its infancy, within limited circles.

Our prayer is that unmindful of where they come from, the ethics of *Pañca-sīla* has to be globally prevalent everywhere, safeguarding and guaranteeing the security of all life, and protecting justifiably acquired property and possessions [and not those violently taken possession by plunder and invasion]. It must also eliminate sexual abuses and improprieties in society and safeguard domestic harmony through conjugal fidelity as against domestic violence and aggressiveness, on the part of men as well as women. Honesty and transparency in all human transactions, at state level at the top and lower down in society and in the home must, be maintained. And finally, sanity of judgement must be secured while at work in all areas of our day to day life, by keeping away from alcohol and drugs. It is a world-wide catastrophe that both the elite and the intellectuals in society choose to be insensitive to this, in spite of all the researches undertaken and statistics provided on the subject. We need today, without any reservation, that all mankind, the bipeds, and surely not the quadrupeds, need to re-gear themselves for the attainment of such a goal of

human sanity. Round-the-clock work ethic, invading us today like a tornado, is doing the human community incalculable damage, rendering us impotent in the rearing of our children and building up our life in the home. We are glad that the saner world, unmindful of caste creed differences, is now turning in that direction with ideas like Save All Life, Home / Neighbourhood Watch Areas, Police resorting to Breathalyser testing on drunken motorists etc. This and this alone is the only way for peace on earth and goodwill among men. An admirably good prayer to be on everybody's lips, nay a wholesome pattern of living for every human under the sun.

One last word for the Buddhist with the basic ideas of of his religion in his head. He has an infinite series of lives to continue through being born again and again, beyond death. The way he lives his life here, in conformity with the teachings of his religion, i.e. the Buddha *dhamma* for the Buddhist, or otherwise, unmistakably determines the quality of the life he gets hereafter. wherever it be. The culture we have acquired in the area of religion alone helps in the attainment of our aspired religious goal of terminating our painful journeying in *samsāra* and reaching Nirvana. To begin with, the basis of this culture for the Buddhist is the honest adherence to the discipline of the *pañca-sīla*. And none other. It is at the same time, only the start of the journey and by no means the be-all and end-all of it. Now we have to tell you:

On your mark. Get set. and Go. Do it or leave it.

That is the societal foundation of moral goodness in the world. Examine it carefully and one has to admit that the *pañca-sīla* could hardly be anything less for any one any where. We leave it to the non-Buddhists to examine it for themselves. To the Buddhist, it brings about the necessary cleansing of human evils which come under the category of *pāpa* or *akusala*. They are the unwholesome forbidden patterns of human behaviour against which the ethics of *pañca-sīla* provide adequate safeguard. Their breach, according to Buddhism, makes the human a social villain here and now: *appahāya pañca verāni dussīlo*

iti vuccati. So far so good. It adds further that such a person would fall below the level of a human after death. *Kāyassa bhedaṃ duppañño nirayaṃ so upapajjati*. But the man of the world, i.e. the householder, who has chosen and made a pledge to reach his salvation in Nirvana, without prayers and supplication to outside agencies outside his world of living, has to realise that he has many grades of spiritual upgrading through which he has to go.

It is important to take note of this, much more important for the Buddhist than for the non-Buddhist, that the very next grade of ethical uplift in Buddhism, after *pañca-sīla*, has already gone past the territory of what are legally banned in society as patterns of evil behaviour, i.e. *papa* and *akusala*. The law of the land has necessarily to step in to prevent their occurrence. These evils indeed tear asunder the fabric of society. This next grade of ethical uplift to which we refer now is a very paramount area in Buddhism to which many Buddhists of the world have to awaken today, even rudely though. This is the area of the seasonal observance of the higher grade *sīla* [i.e. *uposatha*], certainly not through one's entire life time [as *yāva-jīva* or *āpāṇa-koṭīka*]. This is a disastrous misunderstanding and consequently a mis-presentation, even by those in the category of writers on Buddhism. This disciplinary code of eight precepts is referred to as the *Aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla*. The very word *uposatha* here immediately implies that it is an observance which is seasonally undertaken under the fourfold division of the lunar calendar, on the days of the full moon, the new moon and the two quarter moons. Early Buddhist Pali texts refer to its observance precisely as follows.

*Cāuddasī pannarasī yāva pakhassa aṭṭhamī
pāṭihāriya-pakkhañ ca aṭṭhanga-susmāhitam
uposatham upavaseyya.*

Anguttara Nikaya

The precepts of the eightfold *Aṭṭhanga uposatha-sīla* which have four new items, [i.e. with precept no.3 of *pañca-sīla* upgraded from one of chastity to one

of complete celibacy], over and above the *pañca-sīla*, range over an entirely new area of religious discipline. The *pañca-sīla* disciplines the human in the area of evil ways of behaviour referred to as *pāpa* and *akusala*. This puts the human through the basic cleansing of the five worldly evils like killing and stealing etc. The four new precepts of the seasonally observed *Atthanga uposatha-sīla* cover, at a higher spiritual level, the reduction of the almost gluttonous proneness of the human to sensory gratification which as lay householders they are seen to be normally enjoying without any reservations and restrictions. They cover sex, food, sensory stimuli like music, singing, dancing, and personal adornment like cosmetics and perfumes and also luxuriously comfortable beds and seats. This fundamental Buddhist idea of seasonal and intermittent reduction of this sensory gratification is now very much brought to the fore by Western psychologists under the concept of 'delay gratification'. They consider it a very desirable basic discipline through which all humans, from children to adults, must be put through.

The Buddha saw two and a half millennia ago the need of this graduated dual discipline in the liberation-seeking human. The first is the freeing of the human from his basic anti-social, corrosive *vulgar behaviour* [i.e. the behaviour of the untutored common man] which are covered under the *pañca-sīla*. The second is the cutting off of the human from his endless chasing after *kāma* or gratification of sensory delights, referred to as *vivicc'eva kāmehi*. Every Buddhist needs to know and has to be made to know without any lapses or omission on the part of those who instruct the lay householders about this graduated dual discipline. One begins with the riddance of one-self of the evil ways of the world or *akusalas* into which the humans invariably slip. Thereafter one turns in the direction of the reduction of one's proneness to gratify *kāma* or one's sensory stimuli. Every Buddhist who knows his *dhamma* adequately well has to know that these two together have to be the basic dual discipline with which the *jhānic* process of spiritual culture in Buddhism begins. It is referred to as *vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicc'eva akusalehi dhammehi* at the successful completion of the first *jhāna*. This is where one has to begin and is the first stage of joy on the path of

religious culture in Buddhism, the joy of cutting off from evil and from one's proneness to pleasure-seeking [*vivekajaṃ pitisukhaṃ*].

We have thus far endeavoured to clarify the organic relatedness of the regular life-long observance by the lay Buddhist of the *pañca-sīla*, together with his intermittent seasonal observance of the *Aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla*. These two together, we would consider to be the first steps in the gradually ascending path to Nirvana. These two together would also basically constitute the first item called *sīla* in the three-fold culture of Buddhism called *tisso sikkhā*. These two basic items under the group called *sīla* would also appear to cover almost the entire range of the re-structured patterns of Buddhist thinking under the very second item of the Noble Eight-fold Path or *sammā sankappa*. They are *nekkhamma*, *avyāpāda* and *avihimsā*. These three imply 1. reducing and renouncing the chase after sensory gratification, 2. eliminating thoughts of hostility and ill-will and 3. of injury and destruction of life.

We do not feel happy to conclude this summary without reference to a recent article by an amateurish student of Buddhism who, quoting a widely read book in the West on Buddhism by a renowned Sri Lankan monk, says the following.

Hammalawa Saddhatissa Maha Thera (1997) writes in his book, *Buddhist Ethics* (Chapter 4. The Underlying Ideals of the Moralities, p. 80).

"Regarding the length of time during which the eight Precepts should be observed... the keeping may be periodical and therefore constitute 'periodical virtue' (*kālapariyanta sīla*) ... Lifelong *sīla* (*āpāṇakotika sīla*) is that practised in the same way but undertaken for as long as life lasts. *Aṭṭha sīla* [*Aṭṭhanga Uposatha Sīla*] is therefore of two kinds, periodical and life-long.

The *Uposatha* Precepts continue to be regularly used at viharas in the West on *Uposatha* days. However, it is not easy for most lay people living a household life to observe the *Uposatha* Precepts on a permanent basis. Consequently, it is the second set of Eight Precepts, the *Ājīvatṭhamaka Sīla*

(Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth) that have been found to be ideally suited for committed lay people in the West. "

At this stage, we are compelled to call in question the correctness of some of the statements in the above quoted passage. We have already indicated the role of the two *sīlas*, the *pañca-sīla* and the *Aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla* in the life of the Buddhist lay householders. The *Aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla* is by no means meant to be a life-long observance. It is only those who seek admission, both men and women, to the monastic community who are given ten precepts or *dasa-sikkhāpadāni* for life-long observance.

The error noted here of totally pushing out of the life of the lay householder the *Aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla* on the ground that it is an impossible life-long observance for the Western householders seems an unimaginable flight of imagination, capable of starting, in its mischievous utterance a bush-fire in the religious life of the Buddhist lay communities of English speaking Britain and America. As to what the *Ājīva-aṭṭhamaka-sīla* means, or what it can possibly mean in the life a Buddhist householder, we shall write later. It is no more than a mere quantitative extension of the *pañca-sīla* with no qualitative change at all.



(7) Home Sweet Home. Who indeed makes the Home Sweet?

[The parents, and the grand parents if they are lucky to be still around with the living, together with the assistance and co-operation of the children, shall make the home the sweet haven of peace.]

We are confident that even test-tube-babies who are no strangers in our midst today feel that the mother's womb in which they are deposited to be the

loveliest and safest place for their growth and nurture. Once out in the world in which we adults dominate, they should still find the home, with the parents and other siblings around, an equally stimulating and secure place for their perfect harmonious development. But a home is not a tailor made institution. It is a down-to-earth product: the outcome of assiduously contributed shares by persons of diverse ages and relationships, infallibly both male and female.

We maintain without any hesitation that the home has essentially to be the **largest repository of love and respect in the world**, not on the lap of a girl or boy, east or west. There can be no home, with the word decent placed before it, if there was no free flow of love, dignified love we mean of spouses towards each other and of parents towards their children, forward and backward, upward and downward among its membership. Love in the home must flow through self-opening valves, without manual operation on the part of any one. Its genesis, it must be maintained, is from top to bottom, starting from the parents who beget the children. Buddhist texts already refer to them as **lovers of their offspring** [*pajāya anukampakā*]. It is they who generate them, even via test tubes.

And the children too, **with their wiser and saner judgement**, turn **respectful towards their parents** [*āhuneyyā ca puttānaṃ ... / tasmā hi te namasseyya sakkareyyā'tha paṇḍito*] **with a deep sense of gratitude**. This is the pattern of growth of human virtue that Buddhism contemplates. It is with a very great sense of pleasure that we record that in some parts of the western world, this virtue of respect as a foundation of human goodness is now being propagated as a school virtue. Displacing the 3 R's of the outmoded school curriculum, **Respect** now takes the place of the first R, with **Responsibility** and **Readiness to learn** taking the second and third places respectively.

In every home where one can detect love on the part of parents towards their children and respect on the part of children towards their parents, sweetness is expected to grow as a very natural product. Every member therein welcomes the presence of the other in the home and genuinely enjoys being in the company of

one another. Even the schools, as George Bernard Shaw once observed, will not be looked upon any more as places where the younger are kept away from worrying the older.

Restructuring the modern home to serve these needs no paper qualifications in architecture. Buddhism places in the hands of parents a four-item program for successful rearing of children which would keep the four wheels of the social unit called the family from flying off [*rathassāṇī' va yāyato*]. Adequate love should be shown by parents in the provision of child needs like food and clothing [*dāna*]. Loving and endearing words of address by parents towards children [*peyya-vajja*] are equally basic. Counselling of children, according to need, is as important as the others. Finally comes emotional mobility on the part of parents [*samānattatā*], as and when the need arises, to avoid disastrous emotional imbalances in the minds of the growing up younger ones. The home then, for the children and the parents, shall be sweeter than one expects it to be.



(8) Mr. Cooray in Memoriam Service

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am called upon to deliver before you this evening a Buddhist sermon in English as a part of the commemorative services held in honor of late Mr. Cooray. This, the Buddhists do, as an act of sincere thanks giving and also out of their deep sense of grateful appreciation of the many good things Mr. Cooray had done at the Bank and for the Bank during his life time. Having heard and read about his life activities, I heartily join you in applauding him for the magnanimity of his character, as a man among men. We can all join the poet and sing with him about Mr. Cooray that

Lives of great men all remind us,

, , ,

We can make our lives sublime.
 And departing leave behind them
 Footprints on the sands of time.

Lamentably though, many people are compelled to leave behind their footprints today in the political flood waters of time.

The subject I have chosen for my sermon to you this evening is Peace on Earth and Good Will among Men. More than two thousand five hundred years ago, i.e. well before the genesis of the so-called major religions of the world, Gautama Buddha, a veteran old gentleman of India, gave this idea to mankind as a whole when he said *Sabbe Sattā Bhavantu Sukhitattā*. Believe me, it is not an idea wrapped up in the clouds.

It is an idea of the people, for the people and by the people. It is a very down to earth one. It just means May all beings be well and happy, irrespective of caste and creed, with no ethnic identities as to whose who or geographical locations of where they belong to embedded therein.

I know I am addressing a great many of you today who are non-Buddhists, and possibly non-Sinhala. I do not want any one of us to hold these words Peace on Earth etc. merely as a prayer in our hearts or as utterances on our lips. As a Sri Lankan born in this country more than eighty years ago and bred in the midst of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community, this topic comes to me with ease and unquestionable genuineness. Demographic details as to the number of men, women and children within any particular ethnic group or geographical zone or their religious identities, are not so vitally important, when humans are viewed as products of this one and the same soil called the Mother Earth.

The Chinese philosopher Confucius, or Kung Fu tse of old, once said All within the For Seas are Brothers. *Ssu hai je nei kai sung ti ye*. The great Emperor Asoka of India expressed the same spirit when he said *Save manisa mama pajā*:

All mankind are my children.

The truth behind all these is that we are all human. We are products of this world in which we find ourselves. With an undeniable universal identity of our own. No matter the color of our pigmentation. Leading scientific research today reveals that we did not start, via creation or evolution, with the Afro-centric blackness or Euro-centric whiteness of the humans. No matter where we started, we have undergone color changes in a big way, in this process of evolution, while retaining the core of our human identity, physically and psychically.

Anywhere and everywhere in the world, we humans need and yearn for personal security. individually and collectively. That is why most religions, both in the east and the west, look out for a Father of Outsize Proportions, well beyond their homes. As Buddhists, we are more down to earth and less heavenward bound. We look up to this security and the consequent comfort therefrom from well regulated cordial relationships amidst humans. We lay very great emphasis on inter-personal relationships among humans which are very much founded on *terra firma*.

The finest example of this is the very comprehensive set of five-fold regulations of *pañcasīla* which are of universal applicability. You would do well to recollect that the United Nations, with their more recently acquired wisdom of post world war II, introduced their Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, hoping to safeguard the pitiable and helpless earth-bound humans against the viles and villainies of this self same creation in which we are caught up. From what they saw around them, they took serious note of the need for security of life and security of property.

The items 1 & 2 of *pañcasīla* had already reckoned with these more than two and half millennia ago. Improprieties of sexual behavior and instances of unpardonable sexual harassment would have been equally rampant in the old

world of yesterday. The Buddhists took very serious note of them and chastised them within their own religious system. Their very comprehensive precept No.3 contains these situations with all their implications.

